

## Introduction



Figure 1: *Faeries at the garden end (UK)*, 2010, type C photograph, 21 x 29 cm, edition 1/1

This paper explores the idea that 'home' is where the heart is but I would like to suggest that it is also the place I hang my hat. I will examine feminine gendered identity and the affect of migration, which informs belonging and place; touch on postcolonial theory; and explore my working processes as a photographer using a narrative methodology.

Identities are fluid and coalescing and without the benefit of being able or encouraged to reflect on such a significant event as emigration, the voice is silenced and the difficulties experienced in the transition are not reflected on or cognitively absorbed. Assimilation, considered at the time of my migration to be a fluid and easy transition, was one that was not worthwhile remarking upon. Silenced by the Australian government's assumption that changing countries was similar to changing rooms, historians neglected the stories of post-war British migrants. There is a small collection of literature by those who did tell their story, however through the collaborative study of James Hammerton and Alistair Thomson (2005), the doors for future stories have been opened. In telling my story I will know that my life, which suffered in the translation of cultural differences, is valid to the 'storying' of this multicultural nation. Without the benefit of the multitude of voices of the many migrants that now call Australia home, in this harmonious multicultural society in which we pride ourselves, the nation runs the risk of its 'storying' and myths of national identity becoming monolithic, paternalistic, and hero driven. The stories will be seen as 'traditional', 'natural' and 'true' instead of politically informed constructions (Rule, 2004: 13). Whilst reflecting on the grief and loss experienced when resettling into a foreign land, and the threat to personal identity, my work becomes part of the upwelling of storytelling in the last decade (Weber, 2000: 1-11). My voice, added to the issues and arguments under discussion, tempers my sense of loss.



Figure 2: *Mapped: the green patchwork of memory (UK)*, 2011, inkjet on paper, darning wool, wooden map case, brass hinges 35 x 40 x 8 cm, edition 1/1

My artist's narrative voice reveals the cultural aspects of one who has experienced emigration at an early age. In terms of the influences of patriarchy, gender, history, place, memory, grief and loss, I have explored family archives and artefacts that we brought as migrants to this country for cultural traces of my identity. I have used heuristic inquiry developed by Clark Moustakas (1990: 14) and further refined by Adele Flood (Flood, 2003: 133, 2009: 58) in her cyclic model of art making - a method of solving a problem for which there is no set formula; employing a form of trial and error. I have applied it as a lifelong element of personal growth and identity construction as did she, and on into the lives of women migrants who might or might not be artists in the formal sense of the word. By the telling of my narrative and in being heard to myself, I grow in understanding of the place we all have in the community and the role we can play in our own lives. That is, one of agency and empowerment. From the telling of the personal narrative, identity is better understood, which results in new understandings and in further work being produced by the artist. Thus the flow is now a continuous loop. In applying her model, my research adds to hers and I understand my own narrative clearly and the potential that this has to communicate and aid in developing a sense of identity for others living in a multicultural society.

### **Narrative enquiry**

My investigation is framed by a qualitative research methodology that situates myself – the observer and artist – in the world. It makes my world visible and transforms it (Denzin and Lincoln, 2003: 5). My world is turned into a series of representations which includes introspection through the conducting and compiling of field notes, interviews, conversations, photographs, life story and diary entries to the self, as I explore data from family artefacts and outside sources. The purpose of this narrative research is to study personal experience and to make meaning in a systematic manner, to renegotiate my identity by the telling and perhaps altering of my stories.



Figure 3: *Mapping the new homeland (Australia)*, 2007, inkjet on paper, gold thread, wood, glass, felt, brass hinges 47 x 53.5 x 8 cm, edition 1/1

When making images about my life I am revealing the narrative, the story of my life, a story that emerges through my explorations and introspection and is a truth for me at this point. Truths do not reveal the past, as it actually or objectively was, only the experiences of it. I come to understand my narrative only through interpretation, by paying careful attention to the context that shaped its creation and to my world-views that inform it. The answers I seek and the stories I tell through my imagery are important, not only for myself but for other migrants who desire to tell their story. The truths seen in my personal narrative can jolt others from a complacent security as interpreters or viewers outside the story. My stories have the potential to make others aware that their own place in the world plays a part in the interpretation and shapes the meanings derived from them.

The combination of ethnography with narrative research is a way of working that combines the more traditional ethnographic approaches with the more recent narrative research tradition. What defines or makes the story or narrative become something more is how I interpret stories and how I, the researcher, go about interpreting my interpretations (Barthes, 1977: 32-51, Riessman, 2008: 4). In narrative research the focus is not on data per se, but rather on the stories in the data.



Figure 4: *Mis/alignment*, 2008, type C photograph, silk, metallic gold thread, 103 x 85 cm, edition 1/1

Like Jerome Bruner and Catherine Kohler Riessman argue, individuals ‘become the autobiographical narratives by which we “tell about” our lives’ (Bruner, 1987: 15, Hiles, 2002: 10, Riessman, 2008: 10). The very telling of the life story enables the construction and interpretation of identity. There is no ‘real or true self’ but a form of self-creation. It is not just an act of memory, but through inclusion and exclusion, in

an active construction of gender identity I have selected events and ordered and interpreted my experiences (Bruner, 1990: 116, Graves, 2006: 9).

My narrative is more than the singular interpretation commonly offered by popular media and culture and is more than just a story. It allows a connection to the intensely personal but also the shared aspect of my existence in society.



Figure 5: *George and I*, 2008, type C photograph, 101 x 82 cm, edition 1/5

As an artist who tells her story, uses memory, and visually includes herself in her work, I am doing narrative research on gender identity construction. Thus I can shed light on the private and public face of human experience over time. As the teller of my narrative and as the researcher who imposes meaning on it, this narrative can then be said to be strategic, functional and purposeful (Riessman, 2008: 8, Tedlock, 2003: 166). As an individual I use visual narrative to remember, persuade, engage and even mislead, and in this my narrative does political work. It has a social role and is connected to the wider world of the social and political. My image stories, placed in the world of the exhibition space, either real or virtual, elicit conversations on others' experiences of being a migrant. The invisibility and sense of insignificance attached to British migrant stories and to others who have migrated to this country are powerful, revelatory and unfolding. This narrative examination of the researched past unearths new material – a powerful method for the artist.

### **Photography as the vehicle for my narrative**

Constructed photography is the process I have used to develop the ideas in my narrative of immigration and resettlement in Australia, using the photographic archives the family brought with us, which are examined using memory. These archives are the photographs of the artefacts my family once owned, my past life photographs, and the photographs taken in Australia and sent to the home country to validate our new existence.



Figure 6a: *Daphne Lorna Frost, self-portrait*, 1936, silver gelatin photograph, 8.5 x 6 cm, Jameson archive

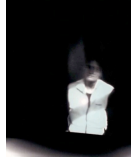


Figure 6b: *Flux*, 2005, type C photograph, 46 x 39 cm, edition 1/5

Where my photography and my memory share a moment of time and history, the past is shown to intrude into the present and therefore render the present incomplete. My images describe the transition between time and place, my ever-coalescing gender identity echoed in my photography. My work, using family photographic archives, artefacts, and my own experience as a feminist, engages with the liminal space and the contradictions that exist between the reality and the fiction promoted by the image. A photograph is not just a link to what was before the lens but also contains the seeds of a narrative that only the viewer can hope to guess at, and which remains in the domain of the viewer's imagination. This encourages the viewer to engage with the imagery and to be actively questioning; to engage with the questions I pose.

Captured in my photography is also a changing state of being which does not support a solid reality; something is no longer there but was once and thus gives me the sense it is still there like a replayed event. Following Barthes' investigation of the presence and absence contained in photographs I can come to discover some truth about myself; my gendered identity in flux will be revealed to me and absence will be negotiated as a constant process of recuperation. In making my photographs, the camera, digital intervention and final output have determined the image's form, meaning and effect. This intervention has the ability to affect what the image might do and what might be done with it (Rose, 2007: 14).



Figure 7: *Crimson thread*, 2008, type C photograph, 101 x 77 cm, edition 1/5

Although photographs are complex forms of representation, they still contain the trace of the face-to-face encounter. There is still a presence present, which means the stillness of photography is neither passive nor fixed. This power of photography lies not only in its recording of lived experience but in its ability to keep alive, through its manipulation, the space that exists between the fiction promoted by the recorded reality and the fiction which is developed around the image as we look at it.



Figure 8a: *Dis/re-location*, 2006, canvas 'A' frame backpack, inkjet on canvas, edition 1/1, 60 x 50 x 50 cm

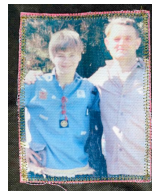


Figure 8b: *I am my father's son*, 10 x 8 cm inkjet on canvas, gold stitching (hidden detail *Dis/relocation*)

### **The feminist question**

The American feminist Nancy Chodorow, influenced by the object-relations school of psychoanalysis explores core gender theories of identity. Her work is important to mine because she provides a framework to understand the impact of migration, familial stories and artefacts (and the supposed lack of maternal ones) on my gender identity construction. Her theoretical dialogue and perspectives of the relationship between feminism, psychoanalysis and mothering have facilitated my analysis of my photographs. Chodorow's writings re-shaped Freud's father-centered analysis of the Oedipal phase in child development. According to Freud, the grounding of gender relates to the absence or presence of the phallus. Chodorow forcefully challenges this emphasis on the father as the foundation of gender difference. The mother's influence is more central in a child's early experience of gender in the pre-Oedipal

period due to the close mother-child relationship in infancy. As Chodorow examines the needs of the child, she also examines the needs of the parents and finds that the construction of gendered identity involves a two-way traffic between the parents and the child.

My work examines the overt influences of my father through paternal artefacts and an exploration of immigration and how the artefacts and migration shaped my gendered identity. The family artefacts provided anchors in the new place of migration; however, an absence of artefacts produced an over-identification with either one or the other of the parents, in my case, with my father. Through my photographic narrative I can examine my father's chronicle that I was a 'difficult' individual and untangle, pore over and come to understand the complexity and ramifications of his story: that he brought the family 'to Australia for a better life for his children'. I question the preferential patriarchal treatment my brother received and dare to dream and come to understand something profound about my gender identity in the countries that I share: the United Kingdom and Australia.



Figure 9: *Spinning the yarn*, 2009, type C photograph, 101 x 83 cm, edition 1/5

This identification with the male heritage is complicated by my father's refusal to acknowledge the female as an inheritor of the paternal name and artefacts. In an attempt to be male, I dressed and acted in as masculine a manner as possible, which pushed my feminine gendered self to the background and led to a conflicted disowning of maternal artefacts. I swung between a strong identification with all things male, and a disavowal of the female, whilst at the same time living in a gendered female body. This subsequent and defensive identification with my father served as an unacknowledged support for the oppressive gender relations and patriarchy with which I was struggling. Using Chodorow's analysis of the place of the maternal in psychoanalytic feminism, I arrive at a new space concerning gendered identity. The 'overlooked' maternal artefacts now become firmly fore-grounded throughout my work.



Figure 10: *Sutures of femininity*, 2010, type C photograph, edition 1/5, 30 x 40 cm

Linked with psychoanalytic feminism are the revived consciousness-raising experiences of women during the 1970s feminist movement. Women of this period reflected aspects of themselves to each other; women told their narratives to make sense of their world and to put women back into it, and since the emotional core of feminine gender identity is relational, women tend to look for such emotional resources in other people (Elliott, 2001: 109). Nowadays, being responsive to another woman's experience makes me conscious of some unconscious aspect of myself and the realisation of a commonality of experiences which satisfies a need for a connection between me and other women (Shinoda Bolen, 1984: 3). My life takes on the form of a pursuit to make sense of life's experiences, which Murdock calls a narrative, a combination of 'myth and memoir' (Murdock, 2003: 24). However, this relational need does not drive me into motherhood as Chodorow suggests in her work, but is related in the form of the storytelling I do as an artist, where these journeys and stimuli are used in an endeavor to create artistic output (Flood, 2003: 139).

My photography presents the idea that if the image of woman can be *rewritten* in different terms then it may give women increased capacity to have independence and autonomy, which in the past has been accorded more to men. I engage with the idea that if I can tell my narrative and offer a different reading concerning gendered identity, I can offer an alternative reading to others. If we avoid narration we end up with a monolithic sociological explanation or an authoritarian political culture which silences the future discourse of this nation.



Figure 11: *Whitefella sit listen*, 2010, type C photograph, 29 x 42 cm, edition 1/5



## **The post-colonialist question**

For migrants, cultural identity is no longer bound to a particular place or space. They have left a homeland and reconstructed out of the relationship between the old and the new place a new cultural identity. A tension arises from the differences between the two cultures, and the migrant can feel unstable and in exile. However, it gives them a unique perspective on their place in the world; they are constantly aware of their difference to others, both self-imposed and imposed by others. From this position between cultures identity is negotiated. My immigration is problematised by being a woman, and my understanding that I came to a white settler colony where my culture had been the coloniser. It is considered, by other migrants and Australians alike, that I had a more privileged position from which to adjust. However, I claim that as a British female child I had a unique position on the margins of this settler society to observe and comment.

Alternative possibilities in post-colonial theory provide a way to understand connections between colonialism, difference and the neglect suffered by those on the margins. Migration has created a situation where a constant process of constituting a sense of gendered identity is necessitated due to the idea that 'woman' and others have often been the repository of all things other or non-Western and therefore considered negative by opposing viewpoints. Homi Bhabha provides a way to think about challenging these practices of racial and cultural divisions by interrogating the construction of difference. He proposes that there are degrees of cultural translation or simulation that happen between cultures because of some underlying similarity to the structure of their practice. Therefore no culture has impenetrable boundaries. In my images I have used a form of mischievous imitation. I argue that through this imitation of the original, the authority of that original is disputed because it can be simulated.

Cultural hybridity, a term Bhabha uses to describe resistance to difference, sets up a new position: a third space that enables other positions to emerge both inside and outside of culture. I can critically analyse from this third space 'those practices that work to maintain impenetrable barriers between cultures' (Lunn, 2002: 11). From this position I can negotiate my identity, not by claiming originality, but by cynically considering the mechanisms through which cultural differences occur, which depend on origin for power.

In conclusion feminist and post-colonial theory have much in common as oppositional discourses to hegemonic patriarchy and racism and attempt to redress an imbalance in society and culture characterised by a decentering movement, a diversity and hybridity that permeates my past and conditions the present into the future. Bhabha discusses the 'right to narrate' (Huddart, 2006: 139) where all forms of creative expression inclusive of photography are legitimate means to represent the lives we lead. I would go further to suggest that in the process of my narration I might reclaim for myself my understanding of my attachment to my homeland and the fracture caused by involuntary migration at an early age. My personal narrative and history nourishes my current creative work. The memory of the trauma, grief, loss and alienation that the stories tell are open to interpretation and are by their very nature imperfect. As I create my works, a shift in my consciousness takes place, and although I will never see myself in the same light again, I have a sense of hope for my gendered identity in my adopted homeland.

I come to examine the idea that globalisation as a result of mass global shifts in population, connected to hybridity, is a concept that begins at home. Globalisation, mobility of populations and simultaneous global contact cannot heal the fractures. The notion of the 'stranger' within myself: the foreigner, outsider, or alien, in a country and society not my own, once interrogated and examined begins to fade. I face my fractured reality and I am able to look into two worlds at once. I begin to embrace my hybrid self and accept my differences whilst now addressing concerns beyond my diaspora migrant status. I become the future and I belong to my past, an ongoing construction that leaves room for any future influences to be incorporated. 'Home' becomes where the heart is, and at the same time the place I hang my hat.

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